

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
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**1. Fact Sheet: Pressuring Syrian Regime, Supporting Universal Rights
(08-18-2011)**

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FACT SHEET:**Administration Steps to Pressure Syrian Regime and Support Universal Rights of the Syrian people**

The United States has taken a series of steps and actions to work toward putting an end to the Syrian government's violence, arrests, and torture, supporting the Syrian people's universal rights, and pushing for a democratic transition.

Executive Orders, Sanctions, and other Financial Actions

Syria has been designated a State Sponsor of Terrorism since December 1979. An additional layer of sanctions was added in May 2004 with the issuance of Executive Order 13338, which implemented the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 and imposed additional measures pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. Subsequent Executive orders have imposed additional sanctions targeting, among others, the President of Syria.

Since the beginning of Syrian unrest, we have intensely pursued targeted financial measures to increase pressure on the Syrian regime. We have specifically targeted those responsible for human rights abuses, senior officials of the Syrian government, and Syrian businessmen linked to the Syrian regime. Our goal is to put an immediate stop to the Syrian government's use of violence against civilians and its policies of mass arrests and torture, and to pressure the Syrian regime to allow for a democratic transition as per the demands of the Syrian people. Our actions to date include:

- Today, President Obama signed a new Executive Order taking additional steps pursuant to the national emergency with respect to Syria that blocks the property of the Syrian government, bans U.S. persons from new investments in or exporting services to Syria, and bans U.S. imports of, and other transactions or dealings in, Syrian-origin petroleum or petroleum products. This is the strongest financial action we have taken against the Syrian regime thus far. This Executive Order is consistent with the remaining sanctions provisions of the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act.
- Since the unrest began in mid-March, we have designated 32 Syrian and Iranian individuals and entities, including Syrian businessmen and their companies. These actions freeze the assets of and prohibit all U.S. persons from doing business with the identified individual or entity, thereby isolating them from the U.S. financial system.
- On August 10, pursuant to E.O. 13382, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated the Commercial Bank of Syria for its involvement in proliferation activities, and also designated its subsidiary, Syrian-Lebanese Commercial Bank. The Commercial Bank of Syria was identified by the Treasury Department as a financial institution of primary money laundering concern in 2004 and, pursuant to Section 311 of the USA PATRIOT Act, has been subject since 2006 to a final rule prohibiting U.S. financial institutions from maintaining correspondent accounts for the Commercial Bank of Syria.
- On July 8, the Treasury Department issued a warning to U.S. financial institutions alerting them to the potential for increased illicit financial activities involving accounts held by or on behalf of senior political figures in Syria, as a result of the unrest in Syria.
- On May 18, President Obama signed Executive Order 13573 targeting senior Syrian government officials due to their government's continuing escalation of violence against the Syrian people. President Assad and six other regime officials were listed in the Annex to this Order.
- On May 18, the Department of Commerce suspended specific licenses related to Syrian Air's Boeing 747 aircraft.
- On April 29, President Obama signed Executive Order 13572 imposing sanctions on certain individuals and entities listed in the Annex to the Order and providing the authority to designate persons responsible for human rights abuses in Syria, including those related to repressing the Syrian people. Notably, President Assad's brother Maher al-Asad and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) were listed in the Annex to this Order.
- On April 29, the Department of Commerce revoked commercial export licenses pertaining to Syrian official VIP aircraft.

Actions at the United Nations and Other Diplomatic Efforts

The United States has led an international effort at the United Nations (UN) to push for a UN Security Council Resolution that would increase pressure on the Syrian government to stop its brutal repression of the Syrian people. Additional actions taken include:

- On August 3, with strong U.S. leadership, the UN Security Council adopted by consensus a Presidential Statement condemning the Syrian government's widespread human rights abuses and use of force against civilians.
 - The United States worked with allies to ensure that, after a protracted diplomatic struggle and in the face of significant opposition from the Syrian regime and other non-democratic governments, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) granted UN accreditation on July 25 to the Syrian non-governmental organization the Center for Media and Freedom of Expression. This was the first Syrian NGO ever to receive ECOSOC accreditation, which allows it to attend and take part in UN events.
 - On July 22, the State Department imposed travel restrictions on the Syrian Embassy in Washington, D.C., in response to Syrian efforts to restrict the movement of U.S. diplomats in Damascus. Syrian diplomats now must request permission prior to leaving Washington, D.C.
 - On June 15 in Geneva, the United States and Canada drafted a statement signed by 54 UN member states that addressed the deteriorating human rights situation in Syria and urged the Syrian government to allow access to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' fact finding mission.
 - The United States led the call for a Special Session on Syria at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. On April 29, the Human Rights Council passed a strong resolution condemning the Syrian government and calling for an investigation by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. To date, Syria has refused access to the High Commissioner's investigative team, despite calls from the Security Council and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.
 - The United States actively lobbied to prevent Syria from being elected to the UN Human Rights Council. Our lobbying efforts against Syria's offensive campaign resulted in Syria withdrawing its candidacy on May 11.
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2. U.S. Terrorism Report Cites Attacks in 72 Countries in 2010 (08-18-2011)

There were 11,604 terrorist attacks in 72 countries in 2010, which resulted in 49,901 victims, according to the annual U.S. report on terrorism.

"Although the number of attacks rose by almost 5 percent over the previous year, the number of deaths declined for a third consecutive year, dropping 12 percent from 2009," the report said.

The U.S. Department of State released its congressionally mandated [Country Reports on Terrorism 2010](#) on August 18 in Washington. The annual report, which breaks down global terrorist attacks and terrorist group activity by region and country, includes a statistical annex that is prepared by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).

The latest report notes that the transnational terrorist group al-Qaida (AQ) remains the "preeminent terrorist threat to the United States in 2010. Though the AQ core in Pakistan has become weaker, it retained the capability to conduct regional and transnational attacks."

The report includes a list of 47 foreign terrorist organizations designated by the United States, and it lists the four nations designated as state sponsors of terrorism: Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria.

Based on a yearlong collection of reports from every nation, of the 49,901 victims of terrorist acts, there were 13,186 people killed in 2010. That is down from 15,310 deaths due to terrorist incidents in 2009 and 15,708 deaths reported in 2008, according to the NCTC.

The NCTC notes that in 2010 there were more terrorist attacks, compared with 10,969 attacks in 2009, but still less than the 11,662 attacks reported in 2008. There has been a gradual decline in the number of terrorist attacks over the past five years worldwide.

“For the second year in a row, the largest number of reported attacks occurred in South Asia, which also had the largest number of victims for the third consecutive year,” the NCTC reported. “More than 75 percent of the world’s terrorist attacks and deaths took place in South Asia and the Near East.”

The NCTC report notes that the number of deaths from terrorist attacks fell by more than 30 percent in Africa, and that the number of attacks and deaths in Europe and Eurasia declined slightly in 2010, with the vast majority again occurring in Russia.

The fewest incidents of terrorism were reported in the Western Hemisphere, where both attacks and deaths fell by about 25 percent. Terrorist attacks in East Asia declined in 2010, most significantly in Thailand and the Philippines, the report said.

Armed attacks were the most common form of terrorist incidents, accounting for more than a third of the global total. “Bombings, including suicide attacks, were far more lethal, causing almost 70 percent of all deaths,” the NCTC report said. “In particular, suicide bombings continued to be the most lethal type of terrorist attack, resulting in nearly 13.5 percent of all terrorism-related deaths.”

Overall, though, the number of suicide attacks declined for the second consecutive year, from 299 in 2009 to 263 in 2010, just under 2 percent of all terrorist attacks last year.

The NCTC said that more than half of the people killed by terrorists in 2010 were civilians; more than 600 were children. Police officers and other paramilitary or private security officers accounted for more than 2,000 victims last year.

The report can be found on the State Department website at:

<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/index.htm> or you can download the pdf file: [Country Reports on Terrorism 2010 \(PDF\)](#) [1484 Kb].

3. Syria’s Assad Should Step Aside, Obama Says (08-18-2011)

President Obama joined several world leaders in calling for Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad to relinquish power after months of a brutal government crackdown targeting Syrians seeking a peaceful transition to democracy. Obama also announced strong new U.S. sanctions targeting the Assad regime.

[In an August 18 statement](#), Obama said the United States has been inspired by the Syrian people, who began their peaceful demonstrations for political reform in March. Obama said they must be allowed to choose their leaders and enjoy universal rights and dignity.

“It is time for the Syrian people to determine their own destiny, and we will continue to stand firmly on their side,” Obama said.

“They have braved ferocious brutality at the hands of their government. They have spoken with their peaceful marches, their silent shaming of the Syrian regime, and their courageous persistence in the face of brutality — day after day, week after week,” he said.

Obama said the Assad government has responded to their calls with “a sustained onslaught” against the demonstrators, “disgraceful attacks on Syrian civilians,” and by arresting opposition figures “who have been denied justice and subjected to torture.” U.S. officials have said they believe [more than 2,000 Syrians have been killed by their government](#) since the demonstrations began.

By its actions, Obama said, the Assad government has shown “flagrant disrespect for the dignity of the Syrian people” and earned worldwide condemnation. Syrian officials now can “look only to Iran for support” for their actions.

“For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside,” Obama said.

The president’s call for Assad to leave came in conjunction with similar statements by the leaders of the European Union, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada.

Obama said the United States “cannot and will not impose this transition upon Syria,” and acknowledged the strong Syrian desire that “there not be foreign intervention in their movement.” The United States will support Syrian aspirations for a democratic and inclusive state by standing up for their universal rights and by pressuring Assad and his regime, he said.

The president announced the immediate freeze of all Syrian government assets that are subject to U.S. jurisdiction. He also banned the import of any petroleum or petroleum products that come from Syria. Americans are now prohibited from engaging in any transaction with the Syrian government, operating or investing in Syria or having any dealings with the country’s petroleum industry.

U.S. officials have acknowledged that U.S. economic and political ties with Syria are limited and have called on countries with more influential ties with Damascus to increase pressure on the Assad regime by sanctioning Syria’s oil and gas sectors and by ending arms sales to the country.

Obama said he expects that the most recent U.S. actions against Syria will be “amplified by others.”

FINANCING VIOLENCE

[Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said August 18](#) that since the Assad regime began responding to Syrian demonstrators with violence, the United States has undertaken “a relentless and systematic effort” to increase pressure on the Assad regime through both unilateral and multilateral methods.

Speaking at the State Department, she said the latest U.S. sanctions will further isolate Syrian officials and “strike at the heart of the regime.”

The United States is trying to disrupt the Assad regime’s “ability to finance its campaign of violence,” Clinton said. The Obama administration will also “take steps to mitigate any unintended effects of the sanctions on the Syrian people,” she added.

INCREASED VIOLENCE DURING RAMADAN

A senior White House official who asked not to be identified told reporters August 18 that President Obama’s call for Assad to leave and the additional U.S. sanctions had been coordinated with U.S. allies in advance and come as a result of increased violence against the Syrian people during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

“We saw an uptick in violence, horrific brutality against the Syrian people that made it perfectly clear to everybody within Syria and around the world that President Assad had no credibility, that anything he said about pursuing reform or pulling back his forces was a lie and an empty promise, and that we had lost patience with him,” the official said.

During August, President Obama spoke with U.S. allies to ensure that the call for Assad to leave would come about “in an internationally coordinated way,” and U.S. officials worked to accompany that message with a robust set of new sanctions against the Assad regime.

4. Clinton: Enforcement of Universal Rights Should Be Shared (08-16-2011)

The United States wants to encourage other nations to enforce “a universal set of values and interests” such as freedom, human rights and democracy, says Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, and she pointed to the Arab participation in international operations to help the Libyan people end Muammar Qadhafi’s brutal 42-year reign as an example of “exactly the kind of world that I want to see.”

Speaking at the National Defense University in Washington August 16 with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, Clinton said the U.S. use of “smart power” means working with more nations to uphold universal values, as opposed to having only the options of “brute force” or unilateralism in response to global challenges.

“The United States stands for our values, our interests and our security, but ... we have a very clear view that others need to be taking the same steps to enforce a universal set of values and interests,” she said.

Clinton said member nations of NATO have been joined by Arab nations in an active response against Qadhafi’s violent repression of Libyans calling for greater freedoms and political openness.

“For the first time we have a NATO-Arab alliance taking action. You’ve got Arab countries who are running strike actions. You’ve got Arab countries who are supporting, with advisers, the opposition. This is exactly the kind of world that I want to see, where it’s not just the United States,” Clinton said.

Secretary Panetta said the combination of the NATO and Arab forces, international sanctions against the Qadhafi regime, diplomatic pressure from the Arab League, and the actions of the Libyan opposition have worked together and been “very helpful in moving this in the right direction,” adding that “the sense is that Qadhafi’s days are numbered.”

Opposition forces are moving toward the capital, Tripoli, from both the east and the west sides. Panetta said that Qadhafi’s forces are weakened, as evidenced by recent senior defections from his regime.

Clinton called for international cooperation to respond to the violent suppression of Syrian demonstrators by Bashar al-Assad’s government, saying Syria’s neighbors can have greater influence over the Assad regime’s actions than the United States, which has had troubled relations with Syria for decades.

The United States is pushing for more sanctions to pressure the regime to end its violence and is assembling “a very careful set of actions and statements that will make our views very clear; and to have other voices, particularly from the region ... is essential for there to be any impact within Syria,” she said.

[Clinton has previously called upon countries](#) with closer ties to the Assad regime to impose sanctions on Syria’s oil and gas industry and end arms sales to the Syrian government.

“We don’t have very much going on with Syria because of a long history of challenging problems with them,” and it is “not news” if the United States says the Assad regime must go, she said. “But if Turkey says it, if [Saudi Arabia’s] King Abdullah says it, if other people say it, there is no way the Assad regime can ignore it.”

The Obama administration has said that more than 2,000 people have been killed by the regime since March, and Clinton says the situation there is galvanizing world opinion against the Assad regime. The recent condemnations of the regime’s actions by the Arab League, the Gulf

Cooperation Council, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have added to “a growing international chorus of condemnation,” she said.

The United States has worked with other countries to establish “the credibility and, frankly, the universality” of the global condemnation, Clinton said, adding, “That may actually make a difference” in Syria.

5. U.S. Wants More International Pressure to End Syrian Violence (08-12-2011)

The Obama administration is urging countries with significant economic ties to Syria to join the United States in increasing pressure on the Syrian government to end the violence against the Syrian people and allow peaceful democratic change to occur in the country, said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

[Speaking on the CBS Television Network August 11](#), Clinton said the United States has imposed tough economic sanctions targeting Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, top Syrian officials and Syrian businesses tied to the regime in response to the government’s violent crackdown against demonstrators who have been calling for political change.

The Obama administration is also spending “an enormous amount of diplomatic time and effort” to urge others in the international community to condemn the Assad regime’s actions and take additional steps aimed at convincing it to end the violence, she said.

Clinton said Syria has not been a major U.S. economic partner, and other countries could have a greater impact on the Assad regime. “We have such a small stake in what they produce and what they market,” she said. “The real trick is to convince the Europeans and the Arabs and the Chinese and the Indians and others,” she said.

She urged those countries to impose sanctions on Syria’s oil and gas industry and for Russia to end its arms sales to the Syrian government.

Clinton said it is important for the Syrian people to know that “the United States is on the side of a peaceful transition to democracy,” and it supports their right to choose their own leaders and have “the kind of democratic institutions that will maximize their individual opportunities.”

She paid tribute to Syrians who have been risking and losing their lives in the protests and urged the opposition to unify to make it easier for them to accept outside assistance. She also said the opposition should adopt an inclusive agenda for democratic change that will encourage members of all of Syria’s diverse communities.

There are Syrians who have not supported the pro-democracy demonstrations because they are “worried about what could come next” after the Assad regime, Clinton said. She urged the opposition to adopt a unified agenda “[s]o if you’re a Christian, if you’re a Kurd, if you’re a Druze, if you’re an Alawite, if you’re a Sunni, inside Syria there will be a place for you in the future.”

The Obama administration estimates that the Assad regime has killed more than 2,000 Syrians since the demonstrations began in March. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters August 11 that the violence in Syria “continues at extremely horrific levels” as the government’s security forces carry out operations across the country.

“There are house-to-house raids as recently as yesterday in Deir al-Zour and in Homs. Prominent members of the local coordinating committees and other activist networks have been wrapped up,” she said.

“The local coordinating committees estimate that we have 22 dead at the hands of security forces on August 10 and 34 dead on August 9. We have some 30,000 people still in detention, in some cases in absolutely repulsive, disgusting conditions. There are reports from witnesses who have been

inside prisons that some of these prisoners are being kept in cages and in the courtyards of prisons and in schools,” Nuland said.

The Obama administration has said that Syria would be “a better place without Assad” and that the country’s future should be decided by the Syrian people. Nuland called on the Assad regime to end the violence, return its forces to their barracks and allow “a real democratic transition to start.”

“Our focus is on doing what we can to increase the international pressure on [Assad], to support those who want a democratic future for Syria,” she said. Nuland urged countries that trade with Syria, especially its oil and gas sector, to stop “so that the pinch will be felt and none of the revenue from this can go to fueling this violence.”

Nuland also said U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Mualem in Damascus August 11 and told him that Syria will face increasing U.S. and global pressure if the violence does not end.

Ford told Mualem that President Assad’s “empty rhetoric” about instituting democratic reforms “isn’t going to suffice,” Nuland said.

“He challenged the regime’s lip service about enacting reforms, and he called for free and open access for the media and also for strict compliance with Vienna Convention obligations to protect diplomatic personnel,” Nuland said.

6. Belarus Political Oppression Prompts More U.S. Sanctions (08-11-2011)

In response to continued human rights abuses by the Belarusian government led by Aleksandr Lukashenko, the Obama administration has imposed economic sanctions on four state-owned enterprises in Belarus.

According to the State Department, the sanctions target petroleum supplier Naftan OAO, fertilizer and consumer goods manufacturer Grodno Azot, Grodno Khimvolokno, which manufactures nylon and polyester yarns and fibers, and Belshina, which is one of Europe’s largest tire manufacturers.

The State Department said the four enterprises are subsidiaries of Belarus’s state-owned petroleum and chemical conglomerate, Belneftekhim, which has been under U.S. sanctions since June 2006 in response to the Lukashenko government’s denial of human rights to the Belarusian people.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said August 11 that the sanctions “are a response to the continued incarceration of political prisoners, the crackdown on political activists, journalists and civil society representatives.”

She repeated U.S. calls for the Lukashenko regime to release all political prisoners “immediately and unconditionally.”

The new sanctions “are not designed to harm the people of Belarus,” Nuland said. They will augment travel restrictions, asset freezes and sanctions that are directed against “those responsible for the repression in Belarus following the December 19th [2010] presidential elections,” she said.

In that vote, Belarusian authorities declared Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994, as the winner. International monitors said it was not a free election and it lacked a transparent vote count. Following the election, the Lukashenko government arrested opposition presidential candidates and placed into custody more than 600 people who protested the outcome.

On May 27, [President Obama announced his intent](#) to levy additional U.S. sanctions in response to prison terms given to five of Lukashenko’s presidential opponents.

The president condemned the government’s actions as “a major step backward for democracy in Belarus,” and said the trials “were clearly politically motivated and failed to meet even the most minimal standards required of a fair and independent judiciary.”

August 19, 2011

Obama had announced travel restrictions, asset freezes and sanctions against Belarusian entities and individuals on January 31 in response to the government's crackdown following the presidential vote.

A senior State Department official who asked not to be identified said August 11 that the fertilizers, tires and other commodities produced by the four sanctioned companies are "things that the Belarusian state makes a lot of money on, particularly exporting to its neighbors."
